

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RANGOO 00762 080728Z

17

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00

SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 IO-11 OMB-01 /062 W

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O R 080645Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1100

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 0762

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT BM

SUBJ: DEFENSE MINISTER GENERAL TIN OO RESIGNS

1. MARCH 6 PRESS CARRIES TERSE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT GENERAL TIN OO "PERMITTED BY THE COUNCIL OF STATE TO RESIGN" AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND AS ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF, EFFECTIVE MARCH 6. PRIME MINISTER U SEIN WIN TAKES "TEMPORARY AND CONCURRENT DUTIES" AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE WHILE BRIGADIER KYAW HTIN, FORMERLY VICE CHIEF OF STAFF (ARMY) ASSUMES POSITION OF CHIEF OF STAFF. THIS IS FIRST TIME SINCE NE WIN GOVERNMENT TOOK POWER IN 1962 THAT MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND CHIEF OF STAFF NOT HELD CONCURRENTLY BY SAME PERSON. IT IS ALSO THE FIRST TIME THAT DEFENSE PORTFOLIO NOT HELD BY ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY OFFICER (SEIN WIN IS A RETIRED BRIGADIER).

2. COMMENT: SURPRISE DEPARTURE OF GENERAL TIN OO HAS OF COURSE TOUCHED OFF A WAVE OF SPECULATION AND RUMOR AROUND RANGOON. MOST OBSERVERS LINK TIN OO'S RESIGNATION TO THE ON-GOING FRICTION BETWEEN HIMSELF AND BSPP SECRETARY, GENERAL SAN YU; THE TWO HAVE LONG BEEN REPORTED TO BE JOCKEYING FOR POWER WITH EVENTUAL SUCCESSION TO NE WIN IN MIND. (SEE EMBASSY'S A-005 OF JANUARY 13, 1976 FOR BACKGROUND). SAN YU ALLEGEDLY HAS BEEN SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES TO DISCREDIT TIN OO WITH NE WIN; ONLY NE WIN COULD HAVE PROMPTED (OR PERMITTED) TIN OO'S DEPARTURE. WHILE SAN YU MAY HAVE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 RANGOO 00762 080728Z

WON THE DAY FOR THE MOMENT, HIS VICTORY IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR CUT.

FORMER VICE CHIEF OF STAFF KYAW HTIN, REGARDED BY SOME AS A "SAN YU MAN" SHOULD LOGICALLY HAVE TAKEN THE DEFENSE PORTFOLIO WHEN HE ASSUMED THE CHIEF OF STAFF POSITION BUT INSTEAD THIS WENT TO PRIMIN SEIN WIN, AN ALLY OF TIN OO, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY. THUS, NE WIN MAY BE KEEPING HIS OPTIONS OPEN WITH A VIEW TO MAINTAINING SOME BALANCING FORCE TO SAN YU AND MORE PERSONNEL SHIFTS MAY BE IN THE OFFING. SOME HINTS ABOUT THE REASON FOR THE SHAKEUP MAY BE SEEN IN THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY SESSION SCHEDULED TO BEGIN THIS WEEK.

OSBORN

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